

Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History, by Anne Firor Scott. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. xii, 243 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendix, index. \$32.50 cloth, \$11.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY CHERYL ROSE JACOBSEN, WARTBURG COLLEGE

Noted historian Anne Firor Scott reviews in *Natural Allies* the magnitude of women's participation in voluntary associations from the 1790s through the first decades of the twentieth century and concludes that their activities "lay at the very heart of American social and political development" (2). In making this case, Scott draws a particularly full picture of how women in diverse organizations at varying times and in widely spaced regions consistently exhibited similar patterns of motivation and involvement in women's groups and experienced similar benefits. Many of the groups Scott discusses are familiar—antislavery associations, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, suffrage organizations, and the Young Women's Christian Association. Other charitable societies, African-American women's organizations, denominationally affiliated societies, or local women's clubs are less known or less frequently analyzed.

In all these associations Scott finds women who believed that their gender made them uniquely responsible for their community's welfare. Consequently, women's groups were often the first to identify problems, especially those involving women and children, arising from the sociopolitical environment. Scott notes, however, that women's activism was characterized by a "pervasive optimism" (8) about how they could both change society and individuals for the better and also expand their own roles in more public and personally satisfying ways through the collective experience of working in women's groups. In this respect, women's involvement in voluntary associations was paradoxically both altruistic and self-serving.

Although Scott's conclusions are not new to the analysis of white, middle-class women's movement out of their traditionally defined sphere and into what were essentially careers for some women like Iowan Annie Wittenmyer, she uncovers the breadth of this phenomenon and argues that women's voluntary associations—white, black, Catholic, Protestant, and in every region of the United States—profoundly influenced "American concepts of community responsibility and social welfare" (178). The catalog of institutions and services that emerges is impressive: libraries, asylums, juvenile courts, federal bureaus, child-care facilities, community centers, women's colleges, protective legislation, anti-lynching laws, and a variety of self-improvement projects. According to Scott, "if we could somehow imagine

American community existence without any of the institutions, programs, and ways of doing the things that have been put in place by organized women there would be little need to argue this point" (178).

Scott divides *Natural Allies* into two major sections: the first deals with the rise of benevolence, reform, and soldiers aid societies before and during the Civil War. Christian duty justified women's initial involvement in social concerns, but their increasing contact with the problems of women and children inevitably raised their consciousness of other issues. In a typical pattern, voluntary associations that originally targeted prostitution as a moral issue soon discovered that they needed to address women's employment, deplorable prison conditions, and the lack of orphanages. The complexity of these problems ultimately led women to petition and lobby city and state governments, consequently advancing their own development as well as the needs of others.

In the second section of the book, Scott turns to religious, self-improvement, and community improvement activities undertaken by women between 1880 and 1920, and traces their contributions to the social justice movement. Because of the industrial-urban character of the post-Civil War economy, the majority of women experienced new work roles. A few affluent women also had new opportunities in education and the professions. While women's voluntary associations expanded in members and goals, they retained their predecessors' understanding of women as moral beings with special responsibility for community well-being. Scott documents the pervasiveness and increasingly national scope of women's organized activism in the WCTU, the women's club movement, suffrage, the municipal house-keeping movement, and finally in the development and dissemination of a concept of social justice. Although she notes that national leaders and local members did not always share the same agenda and that white and black women's organizations functioned on parallel tracks, Scott identifies an exceptional program of involvement, increasingly cross-class, in "establishing the principle that federal, state, and local governments had a responsibility for just treatment of wage workers and for the health and welfare of children" (171). In the process, women established themselves as key agents for change in American society.

Scott's survey of voluntary associations ranges across the United States, especially adding new information about the role of African-American women, southern women, and women in the western states. The Midwest provides the fewest examples for Scott's study, although she does discuss well-known Iowans Annie Wittenmyer and Carrie

Chapman Catt in relation to their work in the Sanitary Commission, the WCTU, and the suffrage campaigns. The bases for Scott's study are the constitutions, records, and minutes of the voluntary societies and the letters and biographies of women involved. In using a few individual organizations as case studies, Scott is able to provide deeper analysis of the dynamics of women's participation in voluntary associations. She consistently compares her own findings with the research of other historians, in the process introducing readers to the significant scholarship of Karen Blair, Ruth Bordin, Nancy Cott, Darlene Clark Hine, Suzanne Lebsack, Mary Ryan, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and many others. Finally, of critical importance in women's history, Scott identifies the work yet to be done in the "exciting data waiting for scholars who will go seeking" (183). Her own text provides an exceptionally good introduction to "organized womanhood."

A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930, edited by Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 395 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, graphs, notes. \$44.95 cloth.

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In November 1986 Minnesota's eminent migration historian, Rudolph J. Vecoli convened some forty-five scholars of immigration history to address the topic, "A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930: Comparative Perspectives." This volume, edited by Vecoli and Suzanne Sinke, presents fifteen of the twenty-five papers given at that conference, omitting the others and about twenty formal comments, which, along with an index, are missed. A few of the papers are broad and ecumenical; most are case studies of migration processes; all rest on primary source research and are attentive to both the European and American settings.

First comes the landmark essay (and exhortation) originally delivered in Stockholm in 1960 by the English historian Frank Thistlethwaite. This is fitting, because the conference was in many ways a realization of Thistlethwaite's 1960 agenda, to tear down the "salt-water curtain" (20) separating European and American scholars. "We should think neither of emigrants nor immigrants, but of migrants," Thistlethwaite wrote, and "treat the process of migration as a complete sequence of experiences whereby the individual moves from one social identity to another" (22). Few disagree now.

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